

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Marifrances Trivelli Oral History
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Male Speaker: Hard question first. Please say your name and spell it.

Marifrances Trivelli: I'm Marifrances Trivelli. It's M-A-R-I, lowercase F, R-A-N-C-E-S. Trivelli is T-R-I-V-E-L-L-I. That is a hard question. [laughter]

MS: Where were you born?

MT: I was born in Annapolis, Maryland.

MS: We're going to talk about history here. What do we know about the area around the port in its earliest days, before the discovery, or encounter of the Europeans coming in? What was this area like?

MT: Well, it's safe to say that the area that we now know as the port today was virtually unrecognizable centuries ago. It was a very shallow water area populated by Native American peoples, agriculturally based people. When you think of all of the changes that have made in the harbor since then, you would not recognize it. I'm sure Cabrillo would not recognize it had he walked the Earth today.

MS: There were shipping activities and trading. The Chumash were involved. Talk about the fact that there were people, not necessarily using the port in a formal way, but there were people in Catalina.

MT: There was always some sort of trade going on. Any time two groups of humans get together, of course, they're going to engage in some kind of commerce. So, we talk about the founding of the port in 1907. That's the formal founding of the port. But trade has been going on for centuries.

MS: Talk about the Chumash. Is he going canoes and all of that? Do you know anything about that?

MT: I hadn't really thought about that. That could be for the blooper reel.

MS: Talk about the European discovery of the port. What was that expedition? Why did they come here? What were they doing, and who were they and all of that?

MT: When we think of the discovery of what is now the Port of Los Angeles, we credit Juan Cabrillo, who many people don't realize – actually, we don't have proof that he walked the land and spent any significant amount of time here. But he did survey it from the deck of his ship. He commented that it would be a fine harbor. He noted the latitude of the area. Then a few days later, he was continuing in the Channel Islands. He was injured and died not long afterwards. But he is credited in the year 1542 as the first European discovery of the area.

MS: Why did Cabrillo come here? Why was he sailing up and down here?

MT: He was sent from Portugal.

MS: You have to say Juan Cabrillo.

MT: Okay. Can I back up? Because there was a title of the person who sent him. I know where it is, if I can use that.

MS: Sure. Tell me about Juan Cabrillo and his expedition. Why was he coming up here?

MT: Juan Cabrillo was a Portuguese explorer. He came here in 1542 on assignment from the viceroy of New Spain.

MS: Why was he here? What was he doing?

MT: I don't know what he was doing.

MS: Well, he was seeing what they had in New Spain and what the land was.

MT: Yes. Right. So, Cabrillo was surveying the land and making note of some of the natural resources and maybe some future routes.

MS: Now, he gave the area a name, one of its earliest names. Talk about that story.

MT: Yes.

MS: What was that early name?

MT: He called it Bahia. Juan Cabrillo, when he was looking at the area, referred to it as Bahia de los Fumos. I was practicing. All right. Juan Cabrillo is credited with giving this area the name of Bahia de los Fumos, which translated into English is Bay of Smokes. There was some discussion as to whether he was looking at Native American means of communicating with smoke or were they just trying to get the wild animals into the open for their hunting purposes. We're not sure why those fires were being set, but that was the name he gave the area.

MS: Just do that again. You have to say that when he looked out, he saw a bunch of smoke. He saw a number of fires. That's why he named it that. So, start again with Juan Cabrillo.

MT: Okay. When Juan Cabrillo looked at the area, he saw a number of fires. That led him to name this place informally Bahia de los Fumos or Bay of Smokes. We are not sure exactly what the smoke was for. It may have been the Native Americans signaling one another, or it could have been their attempts to push some of the wild animals into the open as part of their hunting operations.

MS: Describe the landscape that he saw from his ship. What did the port look like to Cabrillo?

MT: Well, there were virtually no settlements. When Cabrillo looked at the area that we know today as the port, there were no settlements whatsoever. So, it was very rural. We would say

unspoiled area.

MS: There's about fifteen or twenty Native American villages that you can see.

MT: Yes. I did not count that.

MS: Well, describe physically just the port with mudflats. Describe that. Forget about the settlements. Did it look like San Francisco Bay?

MT: I'm sorry. When Cabrillo looked out at the land that is now the Port of Los Angeles, it wasn't any place where you could introduce a large tanker or a cargo ship. It was a very shallow, muddy area with sandbars and an island right in the middle of what would be the main harbor.

MS: Who was the next person to come by here and take a look at this area?

MT: I think it was (Vinciano?).

MS: Yes.

MT: Is that pronounced correctly? Because I have it here – out here with Sepulveda and (Sebulveda?) and everything else. Okay.

MS: So, tell us who was the next person to come up here? What was he doing? Why was he up here?

MT: Well, we know that in 1602, Sebastian Vizcaino was here in the harbor. He had been sent by the viceroy of Mexico to survey the area in preparation for further incursions up north on behalf of the people of Mexico.

MS: He gave the port a name, or at least he noted it on his charts. Vizcaino named the area Ensenada de Los Andres. That is for the name of the saint on which calendar day he chose to name the area.

MS: So, how did he get the name San Pedro?

MT: Well, it wasn't until 1734 when another explorer, Bueno, named the area San Pedro.

MS: I think his name is Cabrera.

MT: Yes. It's Cabrera. I know. I used his last name. Cabrera Bueno named the bay San Pedro. Okay. Want to say that again?

MS: Yes. Hold on one second. Go ahead.

MT: In 1734, Cabrera Bueno, who was another explorer, named the bay San Pedro after the martyred archbishop of Alexandria.

MS: He probably called it Pedro, so rather than (Pidro?).

MT: Yes. Do you want me to go back and say it the correct way?

MS: Right. Go ahead.

MT: In 1734, Cabrera Bueno named the area San Pedro after the martyred archbishop of Alexandria.

MS: So, talk about the earliest activities, the Dominguez family, the Sepulvedas, the ranchos, and the first use of the port as a formal kind of port. What was the cargo, the hides?

MT: You want to talk about that?

MS: Yes.

MT: Well, do you want to talk about the smuggling at least?

MS: We'll get to that later when it's all that connected. The Pueblo of Los Angeles was founded in 1781. You can mention that if you like. The rancho period began with the large ranchos, with the Dominguez and Sepulveda families who basically had divided the land all around the port and early on began to use it as a port and using many for hides. So, tell me all of that.

MT: Well, early on, the land of this area was divided after a series of struggles and lawsuits between two families, the Sepulveda family and the Dominguez family. They were mostly agricultural in nature. But they still started to contribute to the early growth of the port.

MS: Well, actually, they had huge cattle operations. That's what they were.

MT: Yes. To me, anything not maritime is agricultural.

MS: [laughter]

MT: You're right. Yes.

MS: Start again. You can start with this. The Pueblo of Los Angeles was founded in 1781. Shortly after, the large ranchos began to be developed. That leads us to the Sepulveda family.

MT: The City of Los Angeles was founded in 1781. Then not long after that, the ranchos began to flourish in this area, mostly under the Sepulveda and Dominguez families.

MS: Not really. About twenty to thirty families.

MT: Not really. I know. Do you want to give me something to read otherwise?

MS: No.

MT: I'm serious. I feel like I'm really wasting your time.

MS: No.

MT: Because this is not my strong area.

MS: Yes.

MT: Did you want me to read something else or –

MS: No. We'll just fish through it. It's okay.

MT: All right. [laughter] Just tell me what to say. How's that? I'm serious.

MS: Basically, what it was is you started right with the ranchos. Two of the large ranchos near the San Pedro Harbor area were owned by the Dominguez and Sepulveda families. Early on, because they were cattle interests and they had cattle ranchers, they used the port as a port for shipping hides. That's when Dana gets involved. So, start again with 1781 and go through from there to the importance. Basically, the earliest cargo in the port was hides.

MT: In 1781, the City of Los Angeles was founded. Then about that time, the rancho system really takes off in this area. One of the major trade items are hides. So, the Dominguez and Sepulveda families, who were major ranch owners and operators, became involved with the hide trade. Of course, the hides had to be shipped out of this port. That was a very difficult thing to do given the shallow and undeveloped nature of the port. It just gives you some background when you talk about Richard Henry Dana and how arduous it was for him and his shipmates to have to roll these hides down a hill and drag them to a lighter and then onto the ships.

MS: Who was Richard Henry Dana? How did he come here? Why did he come here? What could you tell us about the port?

MT: Richard Henry Dana was actually a New Englander. He was a student at Harvard and was having some health issues. This is about 1835. He and his family decide that perhaps the best thing for him is to make a journey around Cape Horn for his health and some life experience. So, off he goes on the Brig Pilgrim. Of course, there is no Panama Canal. But after successfully rounding Cape Horn and coming up the coast, he arrives at San Pedro. He gives a contemporary account of the place, which is not very flattering, and compares it unfavorably to San Francisco and other places. He was not happy with his job, which was dragging the hides down the hill. Then when they would become lodged in the hillside, having to rest them out to get them onto the ship. There was really no semblance of nightlife or social life for the sailors in San Pedro. So, it's ironic that now, of course, we have a school name for him in town. I don't think he would ever imagine that when he first saw the area.

MS: He called the place this miserable hole.

MT: Right. Right.

MS: Do you want to pick that up?

MT: Okay. Dana actually characterized San Pedro as this miserable hole.

MS: Now, we're going to start getting more into your area.

MT: [laughter] Good.

MS: Creeping up. Phineas Banning, who was Phineas Banning? Why is he important?

MT: Okay. Phineas Banning was probably one of the most important players in the growth of the harbor. He was from Wilmington, Delaware, originally, and came west and could have made the same assessment as Richard Henry Dana and left. But instead, Banning saw potential in this mudflat. He became involved in almost every aspect of port related commerce, be it railroad, stagecoach, land ownership, encouraging the establishment of the drum barracks. You name it. He was quite a visionary. The port has really benefited and grown because of his vision and his energy.

MS: What was the free harbor fight? What's the story of that?

MT: A free harbor means that if the harbor is established, any railroad or any trader or trading group could use it. When you were competing with the Southern Pacific Railroad, the last thing they wanted was a free harbor. They were known as the octopus. They wanted complete control over any goods or persons moving in and out on their tracks. So, this, in essence, was the struggle between how the railroad was going to be run and operated and where would it be located. It was really the decision between San Pedro or Santa Monica. It wasn't until Senator Stephen M. White successfully maneuvered in Washington was San Pedro declared the site of the harbor.

MS: So, explain why the SP wanted Santa Monica rather? It wasn't objective they had rail connections.

MT: Huntington and the Southern Pacific had already established a lot of holdings in the Santa Monica area and had started to build their railroad at that spot. So, the last thing they wanted was any government funding going into San Pedro.

MS: Well, how did this port that looked, even then, pretty unpromising compared to San Francisco, even San Diego? How did it win over Santa Monica? Why did they win?

MT: Do you want to get into that compromise with White and the – is that too technical with the –

MS: No. I mean, one, because the federal government came out and said it was a better place.

MT: Right. Exactly. The decision was made by the board of engineers, as you know, with Admiral Walker, et cetera. They came to that decision in spite of Huntington's lobbying, right?

MS: They brought the senator from Maine. You remember his wonderful quote?

MT: Which one?

MS: I won't say it exactly. Basically, he said, essentially, God wanted to give you a harbor.

MT: Oh, that's right. Why do you want something that's not – nature can't do it for you. The government can't do what nature has not done. Something like that.

MS: If you can remember the quote.

MT: Yes. I think it's in this one. Yes. Do you want to use that?

MS: Talk about the evaluations that were going on, some positive, some negative, about the potential of the port here.

MT: Well, Senator Frye from Maine was invited to come down here and look at the area. Anyone hoping that he would think that this would be an ideal place for the port was disappointed. Because he ended up admonishing the San Pedro supporters, saying that the Lord had not given you much to start with and what are you expecting the government to make this out of whole cloth and don't even bother. I'm not behind this project.

MS: Yet there was a study – talk about that – that did favor San Pedro over Santa Monica.

MT: Right. The Corps of Engineers study and how Huntington blocked it and slowed it down?

MS: Yes.

MT: I forget the name of the person that wrote that.

MS: Wrote the report?

MT: Yes. Well, it's the Corps of Engineers. But wasn't there someone he bought? Didn't he buy it? [laughter] I'd say even in spite of the initial recommendations, put it that way. Even in spite of some initial recommendations from the Corps of Engineers, Huntington was not to be outdone and continued to lobby for Santa Monica.

MS: Recommendation preferring San Pedro. Go ahead. Start again.

MT: Even in spite of official recommendations preferring San Pedro to Santa Monica, Huntington would not give up and continue to press against San Pedro being selected.

MS: The turning point and Stephen M. White. Talk about what basically won the war here.

MT: That if the harbor was here, then any railroad line would be able to use it, in effect, the free harbor. That's exactly what Huntington did not want. So, we introduced that amendment. That's what carried the day.

MS: Also, in a national context, this is the emerging progressive era. The last thing the progressives wanted was more large syndicates, like the Southern Pacific dictating international and national trade.

MT: Do you want to get into that?

MS: I think so. It certainly helps explain why the federal government –

MT: So, if you look at this era as maybe the dawn of progressivism, it would be the last thing people wanted was to have one conglomerate with a total stranglehold on railroad operations. So, when Senator White came through with the suggestion or amendment that any railroad or business concern would be able to utilize the area that would become the free harbor. That's what carried the day.

MS: They celebrated with a free harbor jubilee. Talk about that, just to describe this gala event.

MT: Sure. Before I answer that, did you see the film of the breakwater rocks being dropped?

MS: Oh, yes.

MT: You can get it online. It's boring after the first few minutes.

MS: Yes. But it's great.

MT: But it's cool. April 1899 was about the biggest barbecue San Pedro had ever seen. Twenty thousand people showed up and celebrated with food and conversation and activities and the highlight being the dropping of the first boulders to what would become the federal breakwater.

MS: What was the significance of the breakwater? What did it do to make the port now more viable? What was physically being done to the port to make it more viable as a port?

MT: Well, it creates a sheltered area. The federal breakwater, which was not the first breakwater, but would be the longest, largest, sheltered section of San Pedro Bay. So, now, all of the challenges that had been faced by earlier harbor operations, most of them would be solved with the erection of this breakwater. I'm going to restate that. The importance of the federal breakwater meant that suddenly portions of San Pedro Bay were now sheltered from the elements. Now, larger vessels would be accommodated more comfortably, safely, a safe haven for some of the visiting and stationed military vessels or what have you. So, this is certainly now going to be a more attractive area in which to do business.

MS: Of course, part of the military is the Great White Fleet coming here and ultimately the decision later. So, talk about that whole story.

MT: So, as you know, in 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt sent sixteen battleships around the world in a show of U.S. strength. One of the stops for these battleships was San Pedro. Again, crowds, parades, it was a huge day in the harbor. In fact, some of the photographs we see have an arch that says Welcome to the Harbor City. So, San Pedro is very much thinking in these maritime terms. But what also comes out of that visit is the Navy takes notice of this port city. It might be no surprise then that by 1919, the U.S. Navy is sending the Pacific Fleet over to be stationed in the San Pedro Bay.

MS: So, this really gave recognition (and stamps?).

MT: It did.

MS: Tell me that.

MT: So, the importance of the Great White Fleet visit for San Pedro was because the Navy took new notice of the area, then by 1919, of course, had designated San Pedro Bay as the home of the Pacific Fleet.

MS: I'll take you a little bit back to Banning's time and then forward again. What was Wilmington like? What were the early days of Wilmington? What's the role of Wilmington?

MT: You mean when Banning was in his heyday?

MS: Starting with Banning, of course, but bringing it up. So, tell us the little mini history of Wilmington and its importance to the port.

MT: Well, Wilmington was initially known as New San Pedro before it was renamed in honor of Phineas Banning's hometown. In Banning's day, it was more developed than San Pedro and was very busy with his different business concerns. He had actually left the immediate San Pedro area and gone into Wilmington, partly to get away from some of the competition that he was getting in this area of the port. So, Wilmington was really up and running because of Phineas Banning's efforts.

MS: I don't want to get into too much detail, but we have these famous photographs of Timms' Landing and all of it. What was the first kind of structures that were going up here? From the time there were mudflats, the first structure was a little –

MT: Didn't Timms drag something out here? Timms dragged, I think, some vessels out here and lashed them. The silt, et cetera, became –

MS: I didn't know that.

MT: Yes. But anyway, what was your question?

MS: So, the question is the first physical structure. When was that –

MT: Oh, the hide house?

MS: Hide house, and then Timms' Landing and all of this. From what they're looking like today, what are these first structures that we start seeing in the development?

MT: Just adobe. Yes.

MS: Just describe it. What were the buildings that really began at the harbor, physically?

MT: Physically, in the harbor, as far as buildings, you had the hide house in what now today is the Fort MacArthur Middle Reservation. Of course, no vestiges of that are left. Mostly some simple adobe structures and some shacks along the waterfront.

MS: What was Timms' Landing, and who was Timms?

MT: Augustus Timms was an entrepreneur, landowner, married into the Sepulveda family.

MS: So, he was Banning's competition. Who was Timms, and what's his story?

MT: Augustus Timms was a bit of an entrepreneur, actually towed two vessels together and lashed them to some of Sepulveda's landings and basically squatted there. The area came to be known as Timms' Landings. But he was one of the many competitors with Phineas Banning.

MS: Can you tell that again, the towing? So, it's clear what he was doing.

MT: Yes. I want to make sure it's right. I don't want to plagiarize all this stuff. Yes. Augustus Timms was an entrepreneur who came to San Pedro under mysterious circumstances. Some say he jumped ship. We're not sure. We know he towed the hulls of two decrepit vessels over and lashed them to a landing owned by Mr. Sepulveda. Then the silt that gathered there, et cetera, formed this mass that became known as Timms' Landing. He was a competitor of Phineas Banning in business, as were many people. Of course, Banning, being the most successful of them all.

MS: Where was Timms' Landing?

MT: Timms' Landing is located at the north end of what is now Ports O' Call, almost at the intersection of Sampson Way, a minor street meeting 22nd Street. I don't know who's going to know that.

MS: What was San Pedro like after the breakwater was being built? What kind of town was it in those early days?

MT: Do you mean the rudimentary breakwater or the federal breakwater?

MS: The federal breakwater. Or you can go back to rudimentary. How did San Pedro grow as a town?

MT: San Pedro grew as a town really from the waterfront inward. So, initially, you have very modest shacks and accommodation for people who made their living on the waterfront. Then the town starts to develop in tandem with improvements made in the harbor, of course. You have Front Street, which today is Harbor Boulevard, lined with wooden buildings. Now, we're talking about hotels, hospitals, places of worship. San Pedro, at this time, remember, was an independent city. So, it did start to have all of the amenities that you would expect in a growing city.

MS: But as a port town, I think the number of bars and warehouses were greater than houses of worship.

MT: True. We can say that.

MS: Describe a little bit more about the town as a port city, a port town.

MT: Well, there is a saying concerning San Pedro as a port town that you can walk into any sailor's bar anywhere in the world and mention Beacon Street, and people would know what you were talking about. So, in its heyday, Beacon Street had any type of sailor services that you might desire during your stay in the harbor. Remember that decades ago, ships did not spend a brief time in harbor unloading. They had to take several days to offload their cargo. This is before containerization. So, we're loading and unloading by hand. You have time to spend in the evenings and your hours off. All you had to do was walk a few blocks in from the waterfront and find yourself on Beacon Street.

MS: This is a hard one because I don't fully understand it myself. How did the configuration of the port in the early days change? The breakwater was built. What were the major physical changes in the port in its early history, and how it grew?

MT: Some of the major physical changes in the harbor, in addition to construction of the various breakwaters, was the removal of Dead Man's Island. You'll see in older photos, right up until the late 1920s, an island right there on the main channel. So, you have a true hazard to navigation. It prevented the port from deepening the channel in any significant way. So, that island was gradually blasted away by the Corps of Engineers. The materials that were once Dead Man's Island were used to increase the footage of Terminal Island.

MS: Why was it called Dead Man's Island?

MT: The legend is that people were buried there. The name Dead Man's Island comes from the legend that people were buried there. Early marines killed in skirmishes in the different wars with Mexico, or sailors, anyone killed on the job. Legend has it they would be buried at Dead Man's –

MS: [unintelligible] legend and fact.

MT: Well, they found a few bodies. They didn't find like a cemetery.

MS: No, no. It wasn't a cemetery. It was basically when Gillespie's troops were driven out of Los Angeles.

MT: They put six marines there or something?

MS: They're buried.

MT: Yes. I didn't want it to sound like a formal cemetery.

MS: No, no. It wasn't. Tell me, what's the origin of the name Dead Man's Island?

MT: Well, Dead Man's Island is so named because of the military troops that were buried there during the Mexican War.

MS: Did you call it the Mexican War?

MT: No. It was something else.

MS: Yes. It was the war with Mexico that gave California –

MT: Yes. Let's say that. Dead Man's Island received its name due to the fact that during the war with Mexico, several troops were buried there.

MS: Tell me about Dead Man's Island again and put some dates attached to it.

MT: By the late 1920s, it was pretty obvious that Dead Man's Island was a real impediment to harbor development. So, blasting began. The island was eventually removed. By 1932, it was completely gone. Then the boulders that were created from this blasting action were used to help increase the acreage of Terminal Island.

MS: Rattlesnake Island, what's its story?

MT: Rattlesnake Island is what we know today as Terminal Island. There are a few stories of how it got its name. One of them is that various reptiles were swept down during a storm and found their way into the harbor. The other was just simply the natural shape of Terminal Island, which was rather twisty, reminded one of a rattlesnake.

MS: Terminal Island – we're going through the various growth. What's the next stage? So, you build up this Terminal Island, right?

MT: Right. That's still happening, either way. Yes.

MS: Give me, again, the various physical changes that take place in the port.

MT: We've talked about the Dead Man's Island, the fish harbor, construction of fish harbor.

MS: Can you talk about that?

MT: Around 1913, another important change comes to Terminal Island.

MS: Forget the another. Just say in –

MT: So, you can context.

MS: Right.

MT: Let me check that. I think it's 1913. Between 1913 and 1916 was a very significant addition to Terminal Island. That was the creation of fish harbor. This was a sheltered area meant specifically to accommodate the fishing industry. So, here would be the home for the canneries and the fishing fleet, and actually the full-time home for most of the Japanese fishermen. Fish harbor would eventually host the largest fishing fleet in the nation.

MS: Talk about the importance of dredging. There were a number of dredging operations that changed the port. Give me a sense of that chronology.

MT: Well, the first serious dredging would be around 1871 when the main channel is dredged to 10 feet, which doesn't sound like a lot. But it negated the problem of the sandbar that we had had. But from there, various dredging operations through the years would widen and deepen the main channel, always accommodating larger and larger ships, more goods, and more people through the port.

MS: I think to emphasize it again, you see it as literally a man-made port. I mean, this is being made and remade over the years. It's history. Whereas other ports, they're there and they don't change much except on the shoreline.

MT: True.

MS: So, talk about historically, this is evolving a man-made facility.

MT: What's really distinctive about the Port of Los Angeles is the way it is always physically evolving. It's a man-made port. Islands disappear, other islands are made larger. It's interesting from a historic standpoint, if you are going to rely on certain physical landmarks all the time, they're not always going to be there, as they might be in other parts of the country.

MS: The importance of the Panama Canal to the success of the Port of Los Angeles.

MT: Do you want to talk about the location of the port?

MS: Yes. In the year 1914.

MT: In 1914, the Panama Canal opened. This would have very positive repercussions for the Port of Los Angeles. Mostly a happy accident of geography, the port, by virtue of its location, is the closest port for the circle route of trade coming from the Panama Canal to the Orient. The most convenient port you're going to hit is Los Angeles.

MS: Do that again. Explain why San Diego isn't better.

MT: Something about the curvature of the Earth.

MS: The curvature of the Earth and the shape of California.

MT: Yes. In 1914, the Panama Canal opened. This was a very fortuitous event for the Port of Los Angeles. Due to the shape of the Earth and the shape of California, Los Angeles became the most convenient port if you were traveling through the canal on your way to the Orient.

MS: World War I, what changes did World War I bring to the Port of Los Angeles?

MT: World War I brought a bit of a slowdown to the port. So, we had the initial hoopla and excitement over the Panama Canal opening. But then shortly afterwards, trade has really been cut to a minimum. The emphasis is on the Atlantic for our government. Where the port did become very productive during World War I is in the area of emergency shipbuilding. So, you have the southwestern yard on Terminal Island, turning out emergency cargo fleets. That area would continue to be a shipbuilding area well into the late 20th century, but really got its start during World War I. Some of the older shipyards, such as the Muller Yard, operated as the Chandler Yard. They were turning out emergency fleet vessels as well.

MS: Starting with hides, what was the different cargo that was coming out of the Port of Los Angeles, and how did it change over history? I mean, you can consider the [19]30s and the [19]40s –

MS: You want to get into petroleum, coal?

MS: – the beginning of World War II, how the various cargoes changed over the years.

MT: Well, definitely petroleum. So, you have hides. Then you have petroleum, basically. Scrap metal is a big one. Petroleum coke was going out.

MS: We have lumbers, but it's early on.

MT: But that came in, not out.

MS: Oh. Well, that's what I mean, in and out.

MT: Yes. Oh, in and out?

MS: Yes.

MT: There is a saying called lumber in, oil out. You want me to say that?

MS: Sure.

MT: Regarding the major trade commodities in the port, there was an old saying called lumber in and oil out. What that meant was, of course, by 1912, the port was the largest lumber export center in the country. Of course, the petroleum – I'm sorry, import.

MS: Import.

MT: When you're talking about major commodities coming in or out of the port, there is a phrase called lumber in and oil out. The port became the largest importer of lumber starting in 1912. Of course, Los Angeles itself is growing. There is a demand for building materials. We don't have redwood growing as a native tree in Southern California. So, all of these lumber, board feet of lumber, just all over the docks when you look at those old photos. So, that was the number one import. In terms of exporting, it would be petroleum industry, oil. Those are leaving in the holds of cargo ships.

MS: What I'd read in 1926, this new Port of Los Angeles was second to New York in tonnage, mainly because of the oil. Do you want to say that?

MT: No, because I didn't know that. I mean, I did not internalize that.

MS: There is competition historically between San Francisco and Los Angeles. By the [19]20s, the Port of Los Angeles is already a bigger port than San Francisco, a more important port than San Francisco. People don't understand because – how rapidly this port was changing in significance as early on as the [19]20s.

MT: Would you say the stereotype stuck?

MS: Yes.

MT: San Francisco could host clipper ships at a time when San Pedro was still shallow and mudflats. Do you think it stuck?

MS: Sure. In fact, the facts were quite different.

MT: I think in terms of competition with other California ports such as San Francisco, the early stereotype stuck. So, if you look at San Francisco in the 1850s, is hosting clipper ships, sailing in and out of that city with no problem. Here's San Pedro having to use lighters to get hides out of there because the water was so shallow. What people forget is that by the 1920s, San Pedro had grown to a point where its harbor had surpassed San Francisco's.

MS: Again, another thing that's often forgotten about San Pedro and the Port of Los Angeles is its importance in maritime labor history. If you can give us a capsule of the labor history of this area and how it really is more than a local history. It's more than a national history here that took place – and the people like Joe Hill and Jack London and the various other folks who are here that are connected to that larger story.

MT: I'm going to go back to the Wobblies?

MS: Go back to the Wobblies. Sure.

MT: San Pedro has had a really long and proud labor history. The industrial workers of the world, the Wobblies, came to San Pedro in 1906. We had very early history of organizing, agitating they would say, for rights of the seamen and rights of the longshore workers. Those unions remained strong right up until the 21st century. So, definitely, with the 1934 waterfront strike, which really immobilized the West Coast, what people forget is that the first two lives lost in that struggle were lost in San Pedro, not in San Francisco. That was in May of [19]34. Bloody Thursday was in July of [19]34. Harry Bridges spent quite a bit of time in San Pedro. He was not just headquartered in San Francisco.

MS: What about the early Wobbly heroes, Joe Hill and others who wrote many of his songs here?

MS: Right. Are we on camera?

MS: Yes.

MT: I was going to give you the background for the question. There was an active Wobbly Hall down, I think, on Palos Verdes Street. Did Art tell you about this?

MS: Yes.

MT: Okay. I'm trying to think. Well, Art tells it best. But it's fascinating. Well, I'll tell you. It's something that people don't know about today.

MS: Well, I know.

MT: The Wobbly Hall in San Pedro was raided. Several children were burned in hot coffee. The place was completely trashed. It was a real warning to the Wobblies that they should leave town. It just tells you the type of atmosphere that was in San Pedro, not a labor friendly atmosphere from the viewpoint of places like the LA Times, et cetera. But yet San Pedro was seen as a place where the Wobblies' message could be heard.

MS: Who was Joe Hill, and what's his connection to San Pedro?

MT: Joe Hill was a labor leader, a member of the Wobblies, also a musician. He eventually met his death at the hands of a firing squad. But he did spend some time in San Pedro. Again, his

story is often forgotten today, unless you are a labor historian or so interested in labor. But it's amazing how many famous people have touched base in San Pedro.

MS: *Pie in the Sky* was his song.

MT: Really?

MS: Well, that *Pie in the Sky*.

MT: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

MS: What about Liberty Hill as a place? What's the story of Liberty Hill?

MT: A lot of people ask today, where is Liberty Hill? There is a marker on the freeway directing people to Liberty Hill. It's basically no longer in existence. It is flattened. In 1923, Liberty Hill was actually a piece of private property owned in the vicinity of 5th Street and Harbor Boulevard, close to where the Port of LA headquarters is today. There was a labor rally on the site. Upton Sinclair arrived. He started to read aloud from the Constitution, and he was arrested. So, that story reverberates to this day. There's a song called Ballad of Liberty Hill. It's, again, one of those really emotional spots in the labor history of this area.

MS: How could someone be arrested for reading from the Constitution?

MT: Well, they thought he was a subversive. There was a law against – what was it? This is during World War I. What was that law?

MS: That was the Alien and Sedition Act.

MT: Alien and Sedition Act and something about assembly for the purpose of overthrowing. They thought he was violating it. He really was not.

MS: Talk a little bit about the history of the ethnic communities of San Pedro. What's the story there?

MT: San Pedro has always been a multi-ethnic community. Most of these families came here to work. They emigrated from their native countries, which include Norway and Scandinavian countries, Japan, Italy, the former Yugoslavia, Mexico, Central America. They all lived and worked in this area, primarily in the fishing industry but not limited to the fishing industry certainly, the lumber industry and longshoring and ship construction. All of that attracted multi-generations.

MS: That makes San Pedro quite unique, I think, in Los Angeles.

MT: Yes.

MS: Talk about the uniqueness of this place culturally and ethnically and demographically.

MT: There are a few things that make San Pedro very special as compared to the surrounding areas of Southern California. I'd say first off the family ties, the fact that multi-ethnic families have been here for many generations. You will find fathers and sons and grandchildren all in the same town. They're very proud of the work that their families did. They do have a sense of the history and want to preserve it.

MS: The effect of World War II on San Pedro.

MT: Well, during World War II the port was pretty much shut down as far as commercial enterprises went. The Navy and the Coast Guard and the Port MacArthur pretty much took over the port. You did have liberty and victory ships being built here in the harbor for the war effort. CalShip, right on Terminal Island, employed thousands of people. A lot of those people were not native to the area, but they had been recruited from the inland United States to come and find work. Women, whose husbands were away at war and needed to earn some money and support the war effort all came here. After the war, two things happened. Our population remained enlarged because people saw what a beautiful area it was. There was the burgeoning aerospace industry. It was there to provide jobs. We had Todd Shipyard still in operation. A lot of the area, maritime concerns was very strong. People found work there. But also, the port began a major building phase, taking care of all of the infrastructure improvements that had been neglected during the war. So, here in the early [19]50s, now you see the construction of the Matson Steamship Terminal. We put a little bit more glamour now into sea travel. We don't have to worry now about torpedoes or anything like that. The war is over. There's more of a focus on consumer use of the port.

MS: Certain things came to an end here, too. I mean, shipbuilding ended, and the fishing industry ended. Talk about the changing economic base of the port, certainly, from the war years on to the post-war period. What effect did that have? Rather than shutting the port down, in some ways, it made the port bigger.

MT: Well, containerization. So, that would affect longshoring. It affects manufacturing. That all that stuff is coming in here, not going out. But we weren't making those tchotchkes in the harbor. So, how should I phrase this? All that junk from China that goes to Walmart, we weren't making it here. We've created a consumer –

MS: The beginning of being a consumer economy for the U.S. (and not an export economy?). Also, globalization. Because fishing left because they went to Samoa, and they went to –

MT: Yes. The canneries became multinational.

MS: So, explain those kinds of economic changes that began to take place in the port after World War II.

MT: After World War II in the port, there were a lot of economic changes, which affected the demographics of the area. Reliable means of making a living, such as fishing, were no more because a lot of the canneries decided to relocate overseas where it was less expensive. We had

the cyclical nature of fish. Some years' catches were better than others. Increased government regulations on the fishermen, all contributed to a decline in the industry. You had some of the major shipyards closing. Todd Shipyard is gone. Bethlehem Shipyard is gone. What has remained constant is the opportunity for longshoring. There was a time when it was more economically viable to become a fisherman than a longshoreman. Today, that has reversed. But for the most part, the manufactured goods are coming into this country 40 percent through the Port of LA. But we are not exporting those goods through the harbor.

MS: Let's put this in an international context. Because you mentioned the 40 percent. Again, what we want to do is put this story in a larger context. This is not a local story that went on at 5th Street and Harbor Boulevard.

MT: Yes.

MS: What is the national significance of the history of San Pedro and its international significance? Give us a larger context.

MT: The port likes to refer to itself as a gateway to Asia. It truly is. When you look at the top five trading partners of the port, the first being China, they're all Asian trading partners. This has been the port of entry and by sheer volume as well. I think people who live in the Midwest or in New England may not know that so many of the items in their home came to them through the Port of Los Angeles.

MS: That's good. It's Long Beach and LA is one and two –

MT: Together. Yes.

MS: – together and fifth worldwide.

MT: Right.

MS: So, give us again a scale there.

MT: To give you an idea of scale, if you combine the cargos of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, they would be number one in the nation and fifth in the world.

MS: Are they one and two?

MT: No. They have to be combined.

MS: They have to be combined?

MT: Yes. Now, they compete against each other. But it's always, they say, LA-Long Beach complex.

MS: This is another big question for you because we're trying to answer this in this project.

What is the historic importance of the Port of Los Angeles to America as a country? We all know about New York and Ellis Island and Boston Harbor and New Orleans and San Francisco, the Gold Rush. We never get mentioned in that list.

MT: That's true.

MS: But at the same time, we are the number one and two ports in the country and the number fifth in the world.

MT: This is a really good question. You mean why don't we have those cultural touchstone things that everyone knows where New York is? Why do I have to explain to my own family that I do live in Los Angeles, though I live in San Pedro?

MS: Right.

MT: I don't know. I'll think of an answer for this. Is there an answer you'd like me to say? I mean, I've always struggled with that myself.

MS: I'm looking for the answer.

MT: Well, you could say this. This is such a question. You can state the question.

[laughter]

MS: Well, rather than ask why it isn't true, tell us why it is. How about what a lot of people don't know is –

MS: History is overlooked.

MT: There you go.

MS: The important significance –

MT: But why?

MS: – of the port. Well, forget the why. I have my own theory, and you have your own theory.

MT: I know why. I'll tell you why, because Downtown LA is not on the waterfront, the way if you go to Boston. You know what I'm saying? New York.

MS: That is the theory.

MT: That's my theory. [laughter]

MS: Why does San Pedro not get its due for what it really is? Part of the largest port complex in the United States and fifth in the world.

MT: Because people don't realize it's part of the world. I think sometimes San Pedro, as the home of such a large port, doesn't really get its due the way other port cities, such as New York, may get instant recognition in other parts of the country. It may be because we are over 20 miles from the seat downtown. For example, Los Angeles City Hall is not on the waterfront. If you go back into the 1920s and some of the Chamber of Commerce brochures they would distribute, urging people to visit and buy land in Los Angeles, they do have an image of a steamship passing by LA City Hall. But when you get out here, you realize the waterfront is nowhere near Downtown LA.

MS: I've seen that picture.

MT: The older ones have a friar. The more recent ones have a woman in a bathing suit. Yes.

MS: Let's go back to this 26-mile – 22-mile separation and the story of the Shoestring Annex. Talk about this relationship between Los Angeles and San Pedro. People we've interviewed have called it the hundred years' war. What is this relationship between Los Angeles and its port 22 miles away, which is an unusual situation? How did it develop? What is the Shoestring Annex?

MT: The Shoestring Annexation occurred in 1906. Basically, it allowed the City of LA to acquire a strip of land, which roughly now is the 110 Freeway, which would, in essence, connect the city, make a continuous link with the harbor area. Naturally from there came the efforts to annex San Pedro, Wilmington, and Harbor City. That happened in 1909. I like to think of it as a marriage where one half of the couple feels they got the short end of the stick because they were wooed by Los Angeles. The people of San Pedro, Wilmington, and Harbor City were promised everything from a fire station to municipal ferry service to libraries, police protection. You name it. Some of those promises were not made for years. A lot of people in San Pedro, historically, have felt neglected by Downtown Los Angeles.

MS: Go over the annexation again. Why did you have to have this link? Why couldn't they just keep it the way it was?

MT: So, they could be a city. So, the city could get its hands on the port on the proceeds.

MS: Tell me, why do we have to have this annexation?

MT: The City of Los Angeles had to annex the harbor area in order to own the harbor area and therefore enjoy the proceeds from harbor operations.

MS: So, what did they do?

MT: They entered into an agreement with the communities of San Pedro, Wilmington, and Harbor City in 1909 and formally annexed those towns or cities into Los Angeles.

MS: Why the Shoestring Annex? Explain why you have to have this strip of land.

MT: Because they have to be continuous.

MS: Explain.

MT: Due to the geography of Downtown Los Angeles being over 20 miles away from the southernmost part of San Pedro, the annexation was necessary, so that the city would be continuous from Downtown Los Angeles, and today, the valley that came later, all the way down through the southern part of San Pedro.

MS: One of the reasons we're doing this project is something happened in 1907, which is a hundred years ago. What happened in 1907? Why is that considered the beginning of the port in some ways?

MT: In 1907, the first Board of Harbor Commissioners met. That marked the official start of the Port of Los Angeles. Now, of course, trade, as an activity, had been going on for hundreds of years. But here it is in a municipal format almost. This is going to be the city's port. These are the commissioners. From there, the history of the Port of Los Angeles begins.

MS: What is the nature of this commission? What was it supposed to do? What were its responsibilities?

MT: Well, they're supposed to manage the operations.

MS: Yes. What was the Harbor Commission? What were they supposed to do?

MT: The Harbor Commission was to manage the operations of the port. So, you are recruiting new partners, new port tenants. You are overseeing and approving construction of the port's facilities. You're acting as boosters in a way. You're looking out for the long-term growth of the area.

MS: Tell me the history of the Maritime Museum.

MT: The history of the Maritime Museum began in 1977 when the former ferry terminal was renovated in order to become a museum. The background on that is one of the many promises that the City of LA made during the consolidation process was to give the people municipal ferry service because up until that time, the ferry service was privately run. So, that occurred. There was a ferry terminal and ferry operation from 1941 to 1963. After the Vincent Thomas Bridge was completed, there was no use for the ferry. The building remained empty. Then a group of civic-minded individuals, which is very common in San Pedro to have a lot of dedicated people who feel strongly about something, got together and decided that that building should indeed become a Maritime Museum. So, renovation began. The building opened as a museum in 1980.

MS: What is in it?

MT: The Maritime Museum focuses on the history of the harbor area. Some of the major themes that are exhibited inside are the commercial fishing and canning industries, hard hat

diving, commercial diving. There's a whole room dedicated to the history of the U.S. Navy and the role of the Pacific Fleet in our area. There are sections on Art of the Sailor and a permanent collection of ship models that is on display and some changing exhibits as well.

MS: Now, you came here from quite a different place, Mystic Seaport.

MT: It's going to be in the documentary?

MS: Yes. Well, yes.

MT: [laughter] All right. That's fine.

MS: Again, we're talking about this neglected child.

MT: Yes.

MS: I mean you could just personalize it.

MT: Sure.

MS: What was your impression either way of this place?

MT: A few things struck me when I came here. One of them was that the museum had really enormous potential with its collections, and the staff that was there and just the fact of its location and what a unique history we could share on this spot. That's when we started to focus our exhibits on the harbor area history because prior to that, it had been more general. I thought anyone can be general, or if I want to learn about the Mississippi River steamboats, I will go to the Mississippi River and visit those museums. But what can we talk about that's unique to the area, so that visitors come away with more of a sense of the history of the place they've visited. So, that was number one. Number two, what's really special about San Pedro is a lot of the people who made the history are with us to help us share. I mean, for example, if you're working in a Civil War Museum, you cannot find a Civil War veteran who will come and give you an oral history and share his artifacts. Yet we have people in this community who were in the Pacific Fleet in World War II, who have memories of the battleships, visiting San Pedro, who worked in the shipyards, or remember what it was like to handle break-bulk cargo and will talk about the changes that have come forth. They've witnessed those changes. So, capturing all that history is really exciting. So, we're a young museum in that sense.

MS: The tough question that I'm sure everyone asks is why should we care about the histories? Anybody outside of San Pedro, why should somebody in Boston or New York?

MT: Oh, I'll tell you why.

MS: Why should we care about the history of San Pedro?

MT: One of our founders was named Bill Olson. He used to have a saying about San Pedro. It

was the hub in the cartwheel of the universe. The way I interpret that is the ships that were built here and the fish that was caught here and the cargo that was shipped in and out of here, all of that went from San Pedro and distributed all around the world. So, no matter where you live, there's something in your home that you possess that somehow came to you, courtesy of the port. How did that port grow, and that history is what we're about.

MS: What can we learn about this history that tells us something about America, the history of San Pedro and the technology, of course, the innovation?

MT: As far as the American dream, let's say, let's look at Phineas Banning. He came here almost penniless and, of course, died a very wealthy and respected man, but just hard work. He had a vision. All of those things that we talk about as the American dream, so many people who've come here through the years looking for work in order to support their families and get ahead were able, at one point, to have found jobs in the harbor.

MS: But again, I guess I'm feeding you a theory of mind, which is that the 20th century is a century of technology. This is the port built by technology. It really is representative of this era, this American technological world where we could take nothing and create this great port out of it. So, it tells us a lot about the country at large. By looking at its daily history, whether it's World War I, World War II, labor history, whatever it is, each reveals something about more than just the community of San Pedro, plus America at large. It's a window to America at large.

MT: It's hard, though, because a lot of people don't have a handle on that. You know what I mean? It's below their radar.

MS: I know. But we're going to put it in their radar. [laughter]

MT: Okay.

MS: The history of San Pedro and the history of Los Angeles, which are these places that were almost willed into being. They didn't have a lot of things. There was no water here. There was no port here.

MT: That's true.

MS: They all were brought here by the activities of whatever.

MT: I know. [laughter] Whatever.

MS: Why is San Pedro, the history of San Pedro, and indirectly the history of Los Angeles? Focusing on San Pedro, why is this a national story? What does it tell us about America? Why is it important in an American context?

MT: Well, if you look at the 20th century as the history of technology, here you have a place that was never naturally destined to be a deep-water port and a center of commerce. But it was almost willed into existence by entrepreneurial people. If you look at that as a microcosm and

apply it to the rest of our country, you could see where perhaps the history of San Pedro and Los Angeles mirrors the history of the United States.

[end of transcript]